

Report to Wickham Market Parish Council 15 January 2024

Wickham Market Village Hall

Introduction

Representatives of the parish council and the Village Hall Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) have been meeting recently, together with our District Councillor, Sally Noble, and an ESC officer to discuss options for the future of the village hall. The options are to do nothing, modernise the existing building or demolish it and have a new hall built. The attendees at these meetings gave careful consideration to the pros and cons of each option, along with anticipated costs, possible funding sources and the preference from the users of the hall.

It also took into account the extensive and detailed assessments from a Village Hall Modernisation Working Group (VHMWG) that have carried out in-depth surveys and costings over the last few years.

The Trustees of the Village Hall CIO have considered the above and, subject to clarification on the points raised in Appendix A, have agreed in principle to the following:

The consensus is to proceed on the basis of a phased modernisation project with the parish council taking the lead role in partnership with the CIO.

Main points of consideration

1. The village hall is owned by the parish council and managed by the CIO
2. The CIO has recently worked on the basis of modernisation and accumulated around £100k in a ring-fenced budget that can be used for modernisation
3. A recent meeting of the village hall Users Group supported modernisation
4. The recently consulted and approved Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan refers to modernisation as the option for the village hall
5. There is a sense of urgency to make a decision and commence work as the hall needs maintenance now
6. Options for a new build were looked at in some detail a few years ago and even received planning consent. However, the high costs and the economic climate prevented this option proceeding. This situation is unchanged.
7. The VHMWG estimate the costs for modernisation to be around £1m and new-build at around £2.5m. These costs include VAT at 20%
8. The CIO is a charity and therefore unable to transfer its funds to the parish council. However, it is able to apply for grants in its own right
9. The parish council can apply to the ESC Community Infrastructure Levy and also apply for other grants. Parish council expenses on the project can all reclaim the 20% VAT. The CIO cannot reclaim VAT.
10. The preference for phasing the works means an early start could be made on selected improvements which will benefit the users of the hall, demonstrate to the parishioners that something is at last happening and show a commitment to the project to support grant applications. Phasing the works means we won't need to raise all the funds at once.

The way forward

1. If this council agrees to support the modernisation option the parish council, the VHMWG and the CIO to meet to actively address the range of issues set out in Appendix A
2. The parish council to seek legal advice to create a legal structure for the parish council and the CIO so both parties can co-ordinate individual fundraising and delivery of their phases of the project
3. The VHMWG or the parish council to employ an architect to devise a detailed phasing programme. The parish council to consider increasing the 24/25 parish precept by £5,000 to cover anticipated architect and legal fees.
4. Once sufficient details have been addressed, the parish council, the VHMWG and the CIO to arrange a full stakeholder meeting with those who use and hire the village hall to gauge their ideas on a phased modernisation option, answer questions and set up a regular dialogue
5. If this council agrees to support the modernisation option the parish council to announce the way forward in its February Newsletter, offering all parishioners the opportunity for feedback.
6. If this council agrees to support the modernisation option, then representatives from the parish council and the CIO to plan a tour of other village halls in the region that have chosen modernisation
7. ESC District Councillor and its officer have offered to continue to support the progress of the project.
8. Representatives on the George public house restoration project have kindly offered their advice to support the village hall project once a decision is made on the way forward.

Recommendations

- 1. Wickham Market Parish Council to proceed on the basis of a phased modernisation project of the village hall, with the parish council taking the lead role in partnership with the CIO.**
- 2. Wickham Market Parish Council to consider increasing the 24/25 parish precept by £5,000 to cover anticipated architect and legal fees.**

Appendix A – Issues raised by the CIO Trustees to address

1. To ensure any modernisation works allow the hall to be kept operational by its users
2. To have an early agreement on what form the modernisation will take and early agreement on a layout plan
3. Clarity for the CIO on their role if they are involved in:
 - applying for and managing funds,
 - tendering and awarding contracts for design and construction,
 - supervising contracts,
 - making payments

- checking work.
4. In terms of refurbishment the CIO would also expect to see:
- analysis of use needs: what size of rooms, how many rooms will be used at one time, quantified storage needs, quantified toilet and kitchen needs. This exercise should not be allowed to maximise required space and cost should be a factor.
 - analysis of the deficiencies of the current building.
 - review of the likely levels of funding available.
 - the above being brought together into a brief to the organisation planning the work.
 - assignment of an organisation(s) (architect and building services designer) to plan the work and carry out project management.
 - based on the estimated cost, develop a funding plan.
 - develop an implementation plan.

David Chenery
Vice-Chairman WMPC